Chambers's Coffee House Temple Bar

WOODSTOCK:

AN

ELEGY.

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M DCC LXI.

W O O D S T O C K :

F I R E F L Y .

L O N D O N :

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AN

ELEGY.

Written in the YEAR 1759.

Ah me! what is this mortal life? (I cry'd)
What changes croud the page of flitting Time!
What dire reverse of fate have numbers try'd!
What youth, what beauty wither'd in the prime!

Inexorable destiny pursues,
And levels in the chace with rapid wing;
Pity in vain, or mirth or merit sues,
Equally vain the beggar and the king!

Ah!

Ah! what is Fame the idol of the great?
No ſolid pleaſure can ſhe e'er beſtow;
If juſt to worth, that juſtice comes too late:
Prompt is her malice, but her mercy ſlow!---

Thus on the winding Isis willowed bank,
The varying ſcenes of fortune I deplore;
Waſting in fruitleſs ſighs the evening dank,
Tears adding water to the river's ſtore.

A gloomy manſion open to the view,
Diſcloſing horror, heightned by the ſhade;
Where round the nodding walls the mournful yew
Points to the vault where Rosamond was laid.

Where with her birds of night, haggard and foul,
In ſullen fellowſhip together dwell
The batt ambiguous, and ill-omen'd owl,
Screaming to nighted ſwains a dreadful knell!

Intent

Intent I gaz'd, till terror, ruling ſight,
Rear'd a pale ſpectre from the yawning tomb,
A faint deluſion of the murky night,
Begot and bred in fancy's fruitful womb!

Semblance of virgin elegance and grace,
The mimic ſhape in every part adorn'd;
But wan and languid ſeem'd the beauteous face,
Which ELEN envy'd, and which HENRY mourn'd.

Now gently gliding o'er the hallow'd ground,
Cloſe by my ſide the phantom made a ſtand,
Piercing the night-ſtill'd air. An awful ſound!
And claim'd attention with uplifted hand.

" I once was bleſt with love's deluding joy,
" I alſo felt the worſt extreme of hate!
" And can no length of time (ſhe cry'd) deſtroy,
" Remembrance of my love and of my fate?

O had

" O had oblivion in her peaceful cell
" Shrouded from every eye my mould'ring duſt!
" That on the chiſſel'd ſtone no verſe might tell,
" My crime how great! my puniſhment how juſt!

" But Woodstock's blooming bowers ſtill remain,
" The ſcenes to me, of pleaſure, and of woe;
" And Godstow's walls perpetuate the ſtain,
" My name reproaching, whilſt my grave they ſhew.

" O Woodstock, fated long to be the ſeat
" Of all the charms that wit and beauty boaſt,
" The hero's guerdon, and his ſoft retreat,
" Yielding content, in fields and ſenates loſt.

" Thy glories now are level'd low in earth;
" No longer beauty doth thy bow'rs adorn;
" No more thy woods reſound the voice of mirth;
" The laurel from thy victor brow is torn!

" But

" But thou whoſe boſom foreign ſorrow heaves,
" Whoſe eyes can ſtream for anguiſh not thine own;
" Whoſe heart the white-rob'd fugitive receives,
" When forc'd by awful rigor from her throne;

" The ſcourge of vice, the good man's deſtiny,
" The wreck of fortune, and the waſte of years;
" The miſeries thou mourneſt thou ſhalt ſee,
" Sad Conſolation, granted to thy tears."

Now on the ſummit of a cloud-built height
Methought I ſtood; and from an opening glade
With fault'ring ray gleam'd forth a magic light,
And round the plain in lambent circles play'd.

Sudden the ground with inbred motion ſhook,
A ſolemn murmur ruſtled thro' the trees;
And on the pebbled ſhore the ſurging brook
Daſh'd angry waves, unconſcious of a breeze!

Dædalian myſtery! from the parted ſoil,
A labyrinth 'roſe to ſounds of melting note;
A moment's labor, mocking all the toil
Of nations old, and monarchs long forgot.

High over-arch'd in ſummer's gayeſt weed,
Mæand'ring alleys form the wond'rous maze,
And puzzle moſt when beſt they ſeem to lead
The untaught foot, that in their precincts ſtrays.

Deep in a vale impervious to all tread,
Save by a flower-hid path, a grotto ſtood;
And ancient oaks their foliage round it ſpread,
O'erſhading with their tops the neighb'ring wood.

And nature ſporting, with a laviſh hand
This little ſpot in gay profuſion grac'd,
With every wanton variation plan'd,
Luxuriant fancy yielding but to taſte.

Here

Here on the brink of a pellucid ſtream,
Circling in eddies o'er its moſs-grown bed,
Where ever and anon a quiv'ring beam,
Piercing the covert, on the ſurface play'd:

A Beauty lay, ſurpaſſing all the train
Of virgin DELIA, or IDALIA's Queen;
Or what of Dryads Poets ſweetly feign,
On Ida, or Theſſalian Oeta ſeen.

And by her ſide a form imperial lay,
With roſes, and with myrtle garlands crown'd;
The wither'd laurel caſt in ſcorn away,
The pomp of war in Lydian meaſures drown'd.

The little Loves that flutter'd on the boughs,
In grateful bondage did their limbs entwine,
And ſtrove to join them cloſer than their vows,
With Woodbine ſweet, and twiſted Eglantine.

But weak all bonds when thoſe of beauty fail,
The monarch ſated, left the flowery bed,
Nor griev'd to ſee the maid his loſs bewail,
Nor mingled parting tears with thoſe ſhe ſhed.

Now ſwift advancing to the guilty bower,
With frantic ſtep the injur'd Queen drew nigh;
And arm'd for vengeance ſeiz'd the fatal hour,
When all things ſlept but Rage and Jealouſy.

Each eager hand a deadly weapon fill'd,
A pointed dagger, and a poiſon'd bowl;
My ebbing blood her mad demeanour chill'd,
And anguiſh unallay'd poſſeſs'd my ſoul.

Ah ſtop, inhuman! with a fault'ring tongue,
And inarticulate voice as in a dream
I cry'd; and ſtrait the rattling thunder rung,
And livid lightnings in the welkin gleam!

No more the mazy grove, or bow'r appear'd,
But all around a waſte and barren plain;
The ſcatter'd trees of leaves and branches bar'd,
And blanch'd by frowning winds and beating rain.

And Murder ſhrieking hideous wander'd there;
And ruthleſs Envy, and relentleſs Hate,
With ſnaky locks, and ſhrivel'd boſoms bare,
Whilſt lurking Felons on their motions wait.

But ſoon the Landſcape ſhifting like a cloud,
To leſs'ning diſtance bore the helliſh crew;
Now twang in fainter ſounds their yellings loud,
Now vaniſh'd quite; a milder ſcene I view.

Of checquer'd light and ſhade, a ſober dawn,
Faint thro' the lingering vapor did diſcloſe,
A hamlet ſeated on an open lawn,
And from each roof the pillar'd ſmoke aroſe.

For now with frequent challenge, had the cock
His rival's menacing, awak'd the ſwain;
Now in the pen impatient bleats the flock,
And ruddy ſtreaks the horizon diſtain.

The crouching dog the moon no longer bays,
But ſtretch'd ſupine upon the ſocial hearth
He lies, rejoicing in the crackling blaze,
Whilſt ſlanting ſun-beams dry the moiſt'ned earth.

Whilſt to the ſtrain of rural minſtrelſy,
A band forth iſſuing to a neighb'ring hill
Welcom'd the morn with decent jollity,
And all the air their youthful carrols fill.

With unskill'd hands a ſimple crown they wove
Of Vervain, and the never-fading Bay;
And rais'd a throne within a rude alcove,
To grace the Parent of the Britiſh lay.

Old

Old CHAUCER, who in rough, unequal verſe,
Sung quaint alluſion and facetious tale;
And ever as his jeſts he wou'd rehearſe,
Loud peals of laughter echo'd thro' the vale.

And eager gap'd the ruſtic liſt'ning throng,
And ſtill their joy and laughter they renew;
And warlike Barons, ſoften'd by the Song,
From loud alarms to mute attention drew.

But ſhort-liv'd pleaſure ſoon to ſorrow chang'd,
For melody a ſigh, for mirth a tear;
And now the ſwains in ſolemn order rang'd,
Surround the Bard extended on his bier.

What tho' ſucceeding Poets, as their ſire,
Revere his mem'ry, and approve his wit;
Tho' SPENCER's elegance and DRYDEN's fire,
His Name to ages far remote tranſmit;

His tuneleſs numbers hardly now ſurvive,
As ruins of a dark and gothic age;
And all his blithſome tales their praiſe derive,
From POPE's immortal ſong, and PRIOR's page!

Again, quick riſing thro' the tufted green,
Turrets and lofty battlements aſcend;
Trees half obſcuring columns, intervene,
And real boughs with ſculptur'd fruitage blend.

And arched windows ſhine with torches clear,
Soothing the wanderer. A deluſive home!
And buſy crouds of miniſters appear,
Decking with jocund haſte a feſtive room.

And now of ſprightly youths and damſels gay,
A wanton bevy at the board was ſet,
And all intent they ſeem'd on am'rous play,
For kindling glances, kindling glances met.

Their

Their volant fingers o'er the chorded lyre,
With modulating touch the artiſts ply;
Purſuing ſtill to animate deſire,
Strains that in thrilling undulations die.

And every cheek with deep ſuffuſion glow'd,
Denoting thought inflam'd, and troubled breaſt,
And paſſion, in ſeducing ſighs avow'd
Mutual, yet ſtill by decency repreſt.

But ſoon exceſs to madding riot led,
Enſuing meaning jeſt, and licence bold;
Till comely order from the banquet fled,
Aſham'd the luſtful orgies to behold.

A youth exalted high above the reſt,
In bad pre-eminence conſpicuous ſhone;
And blind ſubmiſſion to his lewd beheſt,
Unrival'd lewdneſs from them all had won.

And deeply was he skill'd in wanton lore,
With fertile thought ſuggeſting every art,
To make impurer, fires impure before,
Tainting at once the manners and the heart.

Pleaſing proportion, youthful beauty's aid,
And bland complacency and winning ſmile,
And wit diffuſive tempting to perſuade,
Maintain'd his pow'r, and held them in the toil.

Ah! why ſhould nature in an angel dreſs,
To lure with ſeeming worth unwary eyes,
Conceal rank thoughts and groſs voluptuouſneſs,
Too apt to poiſon without virtue's guiſe?

Pride of the country WILLMOT, and her ſhame!
By every grace adorn'd and muſe inſpir'd;
Thy early fall how pitied! and thy name,
How much deteſted, and how much admir'd!

Yet muſt unbiaſs'd poſterity admit,
For all thou wrot'ſt and actedſt to attone,
Thy failings were the age's, but thy wit,
Thy parts and dying penitence, thine own.

But now prevailing o'er the hubbub wild,
The clanging trumpet kindles great acclaim;
And all around are warlike trophies pil'd,
And crouds triumphant echo CHURCHILL's fame.

And thronging Senates in the glorious cauſe,
Repell'd Oppreſſion, Liberty maintain'd,
Accord with gratulant vote the loud applauſe;
The faireſt prize by Britiſh valor gain'd.

Who erſt implor'd, and ſoon obtain'd relief,
High-fated Monarchs grateful homage pay,
And fulgent honors crown the matchleſs Chief,
And verſe harmonious, never to decay:

And humbled *Gallia*, kneels with diſtant awe,
Her generals baffled, and her warriors ſlain;
No more to dictate but receive the law,
No longer to impoſe but wear the chain.

But venom'd Faction ſpreading o'er the land,
Too ſoon forgets the mighty debt to owe;
And Envy ſtretches out her lurid hand,
The Victor's meed to blaſt and overthrow.

And yet unfiniſh'd ſtands the votive dome,
By all his toil and all his danger bought;
When juſt reſentment calls him far from home,
Reviſiting the fields where late he fought.

In vain auſpicious BRUNSWICK's happy reign,
Blunting the ranc'rous point of party ſtriſe,
Reſtores the hero to his friends again;
Too late to chear the dregs of lengthned life!

The lofty column and the voice of praiſe,
In vain proclaim him great, and juſt, and brave;
Tardy repentance Merit ill repays,
Unheard, unheeded, in the ſilent grave!

In conqueſt equal, and alike in fate,
Rome's mounting genius, godlike SCIPIO ſtood;
And prop'd by worth and dignity innate,
Contemn'd the venal cenſure of the croud.

Yet once again the viſionary ſcene,
Ductile, for ſorrow ſocial beauty yields;
A temp'rate ſunſhine and an air ſerene,
Foſt'ring the upland downs and level fields.

And tepid ſhowers bedew the frolic herd,
Bounding in gameſome meaſure o'er the lea,
With daiſies crimſon-tipt, and green parterr'd,
And ſhaddowing fragrance drops from every tree.

The wide expanded proſpect gently clos'd,
On viſto'd walks leading to high arcades;
Each waving copſe in ſymmetry diſpos'd,
Points to the terras capt with colonnades.

And more remote the cloiſter'd wings confine,
In architecture elegant and juſt,
A portall'd front where niches deep inſhrine
The marble ſtatue, and the gilded buſt.

Unfolding wide the hoſpitable port
On ready hinges, to the ſearching eye
Reveals unblemiſh'd childhood's harmleſs ſport,
And placid parents ſtand delighted by.

For here unmindful of the call of ſtate,
The ſmile of favour, or the voice of power;
In tranquil pleaſure, even and ſedate,
Great CHURCHILL's heir enjoy'd the waſting hour.

And beaming rapture gliſtned on his brow,
And glad dependants ſhare their patron's joy,
No frowns their heart-bred tranſports diſallow,
Debaſing worth in ſervitude's alloy.

Such charms hath innocence! ſuch virtues pride!
From ſtarry height her ſacred powers deſcend,
The gariſh pomp of grandeur to deride,
And giddy fortunes raſh decrees amend.

A day he flouriſh'd in the peaceful ſoil,
Another ſaw him on the hoſtile ſtrand,
Guiding the thunders of the white-cliff'd Iſle,
Ambition's waſtful rapine to withſtand.

To match his great Progenitor in war,
Elate with hope, his generous boſom burns;
But inauſpicious twinkled every ſtar,
And heaven averted all his wiſhes ſpurns.

Too

Too high requeſt in every ſphere to ſhine,
In peace a Pattern, and a Chief in blood;
The Gods to each a ſeparate path aſſign,
But he alone is Great who's truly Good.

FINIS.

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